

Review of the informal process for selecting the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair

Report of the Panel Lead Member, Councillor Celia Dowden

Recommended:

That the proposals of the panel be endorsed and requests that they be considered by the political group leaders for implementation.

SUMMARY:

- This report brings together the findings of the panel that has reviewed the informal process for selecting the proposed candidate for Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration at Annual Council.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of the review has been to identify if there are opportunities to refine the current informal process to select the proposed candidate for Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration at Annual Council.
- 1.2 The review has focused on how the informal process can enable members to learn more about perspective candidates and how they will meet the qualities of the role description and what they will bring to the role of Chair if selected.
- 1.3 The findings of the panel are set out in this report and the recommendation provides the basis in which the proposals could be considered for implementation.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee is appointed each year at Annual Council in May. Appointment by Council is a constitutional requirement.
- 2.2 For a number of years Overview and Scrutiny Committee has undertaken an informal process which culminates in a secret ballot of members that enables a nomination for the role of Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair to be put forward to Annual Council. Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee have expressed a desire to refine the informal process so that members can feel more informed about the role, skills and attributes required which they can then consider when selecting a nomination for Chair.
- 2.3 The rationale for this review is in recognition of the important role that Overview and Scrutiny Committee (and therefore the Chair) plays as part of the Council's governance both scrutinising the work of the Cabinet, and playing an active and collaborative role in supporting policy overview and development.

- 2.4 The panel's work has focused on two key areas. Part one focuses on the role of the Chair and has explored what this means in practice for the person fulfilling the role. This has enabled the panel to consider what might be required from someone doing the role which in turn could be used to help inform members as part of the selection process.
- 2.5 The second part of the review focuses on the informal process and sets out a proposal for how this could be undertaken in the future to enable members to learn more about candidates wishing to be considered for the role.

3 The role of Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair

- 3.1 The role responsibilities for the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny are set out in annex one and were agreed by Council in 2019.
- 3.2 The panel felt that although the description sets out the main responsibilities, it was important to also identify in more detail what the role looks like in practice so as to provide members with a deeper understanding of what is required for the role. As a result, the panel has provided some additional 'on the ground' information which underpins the current role description which will be useful for both those wishing to stand, and for members in making an informed choice on who they would like to nominate.
- 3.3 This additional information can also be found in annex one and focuses on practical matters for the Chair such as leading meetings, being proactive and developing the work programme, ensuring a systematic and strategic approach to overview and scrutiny and supporting members to engage in learning and development in this area. It also reflects more broadly that the panel felt that attributes such as good communication skills, being outcome focused and evidence-led were important characteristics that members felt they would be looking for from the Chair.
- 3.4 The panel proposes that this additional information be shared with members to assist them in the informal process for selecting a candidate for Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to provide those wishing to be considered for the role a greater insight as to what the role entails.

4 The informal process for selecting a Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 4.1 The panel's primary focus is to put forward proposals for a refined informal process for selecting the candidate for Chair that will enable members to feel better informed about the role and those wishing to be considered for it. It is the panel's guiding principle that the process should identify the best person for the job.
- 4.2 The panel considered various options and their respective practicalities in designing an enhanced process of selection for the informal stage. As a result the panel proposes the following take place:
- (i) An invitation including the role description (as set out in annex one) is sent out to all eligible councillors inviting them to stand for the position of Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair.

- (ii) Overview and Scrutiny Committee will host a roundtable online session (via MS Teams) open to all councillors from across the council to attend, where candidates for the position of Chair will be able to present their case for selection.
- (iii) Candidates will be invited to make a short presentation which should cover two/three pre-set questions relating to the role description which will be determined by Overview and Scrutiny Committee members in advance.
- (iv) Following the presentations a secret ballot of all members will take place as it has done in previous years leading to a proposal being put forward to Annual Council for consideration in the normal way.

4.3 In order for the process to be completed ahead of Annual Council, it is proposed that the invitation to stand for Chair begins in mid-march with the roundtable taking place in early April immediately followed by the secret ballot.

4.4 The panel throughout its deliberations alighted upon a number of practical timing issues in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair being appointed at Annual Council. In particular members expressed concern that in the year of the borough council elections, this would mean that new members especially, may have very little opportunity to know the candidates they are voting for at Annual Council as an informal process will have taken place prior to elections. The panel considered various ideas of how this could be resolved including delaying the appointment of Chair until the following council, but agreed that while this issue fell beyond the scope of this panel, it will need to be addressed in the future. Therefore, the panel agreed that it would not at this stage, propose any changes to the formal process of the appointment of the Chair which takes place at Annual Council and is set out in the constitution.

5 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

5.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a vital and statutory role to play as part of the council's governance structure both scrutinising the work of the Cabinet and playing an active and collaborative role in supporting policy overview and development. Examples such as the committee's role in the development of the corporate plan and the council's climate change action plan demonstrate the important role of Overview and Scrutiny Committee of which the Chair plays a significant role in bringing together.

6 Consultations/Communications

6.1 The Chair of the panel has brought together a number of members from across the overview and scrutiny committee to undertake this piece of work. If the proposals are endorsed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee then consultation with the political group leaders will form the next step ahead of any implementation of the informal process.

7 Options

7.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee can endorse the proposals, endorse with amendment or not endorse.

8 Resource Implications

8.1 None

9 Legal Implications

9.1 The proposals contained within this report reflect the informal process of the selection of the Chair and therefore do not have any legal or constitutional implications.

10 Equality Issues

10.1 None

11 Other Issues

11.1 None

12 Conclusion

12.1 The purpose of the panel was to explore options for how the informal process for the selection of Chair could be enhanced to enable members to learn more about perspective candidates and how they will meet the qualities of the role description and what they will bring to the role of Chair if selected. The rationale for this is in recognition of the important role that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair fulfils in enabling the committee to meeting its overview and scrutiny responsibilities. The proposals of which the recommendation refers to will provide a practical and proportionate way in which to undertake the informal process.

<u>Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)</u>			
<u>Confidentiality</u> It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.			
No of Annexes:	1		
Author:	Cllr Celia Dowden	Ext:	
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